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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8870
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 2872
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2241
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0149
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0717
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1898
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0291
RUEHKKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 5167
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2103
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5376
RUEHNHY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0787
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0610
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0189
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8969
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0184
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0734
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6545
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1757
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2128
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0605
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2363
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4374
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000223

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: REVISED TRIPARTITE CORE GROUP TO HAVE NO
VISA AUTHORITY

REF: RANGOON 175

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Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

Summary

[¶](#)1. (C) The UN Resident Coordinator in Burma has clarified that, under new Government of Burma (GOB) rules, the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) has no visa-authorization powers, not even for ASEAN or the UN. All visa requests for Cyclone Nargis related activities must now be approved by the GOB's Foreign Affairs Policy Committee (FAPC) in Nay Pyi Taw, although procedures for UN and ASEAN visas differ from those for INGOs. The new policy does not specifically address donor visas. The FAPC has been notoriously slow to process visas in the past; so presumably the GOB's revised policy will inhibit donor travel. Reportedly, GOB officials have confirmed that the intent is to limit severely the ability of foreigners to visit the Delta in the lead-up to 2010 elections. End Summary.

All visa requests to FAPC -- a slow process

[¶](#)2. (C) At an April 9 meeting, UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) Bishow Parajuli briefed donors on continuing

discussions with Burmese government officials about the revised visa policy for Cyclone Nargis-related travel. Parajuli said that, under the new policy, an INGO will submit visa requests to the line ministry with which it has an MOU. The relevant line ministry will process all supporting documentation and endorse the visa request prior to consideration by the FAPC, which will make a final decision. The FAPC meets weekly. Parajuli said a GOB April 3 letter about the procedure for UN and ASEAN visa requests is technically accurate (reftel). All UN and ASEAN visa requests will be "handled" by the TCG, which will process the supporting documentation and "endorse" the visa request to the FAPC which will make all final decisions.

Motive: restrict pre-election access for donors

¶13. (C) Subsequent to an April 6-7 TCG meeting in which UN and ASEAN reps urged the GOB to reinstate the TCG's visa authorities, Parajuli met with the Minister of Social Welfare (MSW) who explicitly linked the visa policy to the regime's desire to limit foreigners' access to and presence in the Delta in the run-up to 2010 elections. The Minister admitted that the new policy is in essence a reversion to pre-Nargis procedures. He offered assurance that INGOS that have MOUs with his ministry would receive prompt recommendations to the FAPC. He acknowledged, though, that service would depend greatly on an organization's relationship with its respective line ministry. In a separate meeting, the Foreign Minister confirmed to Parajuli that the new policy originated "from the top" and stemmed from various line ministries' concern that the TCG was approving visas without their input or

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concurrence.

Plenty of complications

¶14. (C) Parajuli and other UN officials continue to hope the GOB will have to reconsider once the FAPC realizes the volume of requests. According to Parajuli, the TCG reviewed and approved 3,600 visa in the last ten months, approximately 12 requests per day. Current estimates of the visa backlog since the policy change in early March range from 100 to more than 200. The new policy requires additional paperwork and documentation for each visa request, in addition to the FAPC approval. Also, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has requested staff lists and temporary duty rosters of all Nargis-related employees from diplomatic missions, the UN, ASEAN and INGOS. Parajuli pledged to continue to raise concerns about the operational implications of the new policy, and he indicated that the UN Secretary General will raise this issue with Prime Minister Thein Sein when they meet at the ASEAN summit.

Comment

¶15. (C) While initial reports of the April 3 revised policy appeared to be a small improvement from the major setback to TCG visa powers of early March, the new clarifications make clear that the problem remains and the policy is indeed intended to inhibit the ability of foreign donors to visit the Delta, at least until the 2010 elections. It is not at all obvious that an avalanche of additional visa-requests to the FAPC will cause the GOB to blink. After all, the apparent intent is to slow visa issuance. The most obvious lever would be for foreign donors, asked via the TCG's PONREPP process to expand funding for post-cyclone recovery operations, to insist that the GOB relent on TCG visa powers before new funds flow. The worry is that, given a choice between controlling the pre-election environment and meeting the Delta population's pressing needs, the regime would opt for control, leaving donors no attractive options.

DINGER